
Testimony of
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**Status of the District of Columbia's Mental
Retardation and Developmental Disabilities
Administration (MRDDA)**

One Hundred Ninth Congress
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
House of Representatives
Committee on Government Reform

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Room 2154
Rayburn House Office Building
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10:00 A.M.

HELLO, CHAIRMAN DAVIS AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM. I AM MARSHA H. THOMPSON, FORMER ADMINISTRATOR OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S MENTAL RETARDATION AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES ADMINISTRATION (MRDDA). I BELIEVE THAT WHILE MAYOR WILLIAMS MAY HAVE ALREADY MADE CHANGES IN STRUCTURE AND POLICY TO SUPPORT THE INCOMING ADMINISTRATOR, MY SINCEREST HOPE IS THAT MY COMMENTS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVING THE OUTCOMES FOR THIS POPULATION WHICH I TRIED MY VERY BEST TO SERVE AS ADMINISTRATOR.

I BEGAN AS INTERIM ADMINISTRATOR IN MAY 2005, JUST IN TIME FOR THE MID-YEAR BUDGET REVIEW FOR THE DC DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES (DHS). DHS IS THE CABINET LEVEL AGENCY ABOVE MRDDA. LET ME BE CLEAR FROM THE START: AS INTERIM ADMINISTRATOR I DID NOT INHERIT A SLICE OF HEAVEN AND TURN IN INTO A HELL. RATHER, I INHERITED A SLICE OF HELL AND DID MY BEST TO BRING IT AT LEAST TO EARTH, ONLY TO BE STOPPED SOMEWHERE IN PURGATORY. FOR EXAMPLE, DISCUSSION WITH MY NEW SUPERVISOR WHO WAS THEN THE DHS DEPUTY FOR PROGRAMS, AND WITH FORMER DEPUTY MAYOR NEIL ALBERT, WE DETERMINED THAT AMENDING OUR MRDD MEDICAID WAIVER TO REDUCE THE BURDEN ON THE LOCAL BUDGET WAS A CRITICALLY NEEDED STEP. I HIRED A WAIVER SPECIALIST; FORMED A WAIVER WORK GROUP; COMMUNICATED BUDGET PRESSURES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROVIDER, ADVOCACY AND CLIENT COMMUNITY, AND BEGAN WORK ON THE NEEDED WAIVER REVISIONS. THE PARTIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE *EVANS* COURT DECREE INSISTED THAT MRDDA QUICKLY MOVE PEOPLE FROM HOMES FULLY FUNDED BY THE DC MEDICAID BUDGET,

IMPLEMENT A RESTRUCTURE, AND PROVIDE IMPROVED SPECIALIZED HEALTH CARE SERVICES THROUGH PRIVATE HEALTH CARE PRACTITIONERS AND HOSPITALS. I COMMUNICATED THE INCREASING SPENDING PRESSURE TO MR. ALBERT. HE CALLED AN "ALL HANDS" MEETING TO DEVELOP A PLAN FOR FUNDING TO CONTINUE SERVICE DURING THAT YEAR. AFTER HE CONSIDERED WHAT SHOULD BE DONE TO MEET NEEDS IN FY 2006, HE ADVISED THAT I COMPLETE THE AMENDMENT FOR THE CURRENT MRDD MEDICAID WAIVER, PREPARE A SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET REQUEST TO THE MAYOR FOR FY 2006, AND COLLABORATE WITH AN EXPERT TO BETTER LEVERAGE LOCAL FUNDS FOR THE CAPTURE OF THE FEDERAL MATCH IN OTHER WAYS. WHEN NEW DEPUTY MAYOR BRENDA DONALD WALKER CAME ON BOARD FOR ORIENTATION IN OCTOBER 2005, MRDDA WAS REALIGNED TO REPORT DIRECTLY TO HER OFFICE. WE DISCUSSED BUDGET ISSUES; I PRESENTED A SCOPE OF WORK TO HER; AND I ASKED TO OBTAIN CONTRACTOR SUPPORT TO ORGANIZE A PROCESS TO USE MEDICAID FUNDS TO SUPPORT MRDDA'S FUNCTIONS WHILE CONCURRENTLY STREAMLINING THE AGENCY, PROVIDING SERVICES TO THOSE LEGALLY ENTITLED, AND DEVELOPING AN ADEQUATE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM. THIS WAS REBUFFED BY DEPUTY MAYOR WALKER AS BEING UNNECESSARY.

INTERNAL AGENCY STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

EVEN THOUGH FORMER DEPUTY MAYOR NEIL ALBERT AND I HAD PREVIOUSLY MAPPED OUT A STRUCTURE FOR MRDDA, I WAS UNABLE TO IMPLEMENT IT DUE TO FUNDING CHALLENGES AND THE HYBRID LEGAL STATUS UNDER WHICH WE WERE OPERATING. AS OF JUNE 6, 2006, MRDDA WAS IN NEED OF:

- *INTERNAL LEGAL COUNSEL* TO HANDLE THE DAILY COURT APPEARANCES AROUND CLIENT SERVICES AND MANY OTHER LEGAL CONCERNS.

- *INTERNAL BUDGET STAFF* WITH ADEQUATE FISCAL ACUMEN WHO CAN DIRECTLY ACCESS FISCAL REPORTS AND FORECASTS.
- *INTERNAL CONTRACTS STAFF* WITH THE AUTHORITY TO NEGOTIATE CONTRACTS AND MONITOR PERFORMANCE.
- *AN INTERNAL HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICE* TO MANAGE PERSONNEL FUNCTIONS. MRDDA DID HAVE AN ASSIGNED PERSONNEL SPECIALIST, BUT THE OFFICE WAS NOT ADEQUATELY FUNCTIONING AS OF JUNE 6, 2006.
- *INTERNAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STAFF* WITH THE REQUISITE SKILLS TO MANAGE COMPLEX INFORMATION MANAGEMENT NEEDS AND DESIGN IMPROVEMENTS FOR RESPONSIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT NEEDS.

AS MRDDA ADMINISTRATOR I WAS IN THE POSITION OF RELYING UPON DC DHS FOR THESE FUNCTIONS, EVEN THOUGH THE MRDDA WAS NO LONGER ACTUALLY REPORTING TO THE DC DHS. UNFORTUNATELY THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUPPORT SERVICES REQUIRED TO ADMINISTRATIVELY SUPPORT MRDDA DID NOT KEEP PACE WITH THE INCREASING PERFORMANCE DEMANDS PUT UPON THE AGENCY.

MRDDA IS ONE OF MANY CITY AGENCIES THAT MUST WORK CLOSELY TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE THE OUTCOMES REQUIRED BY THE *EVANS* PLAN. THESE AGENCIES INCLUDE DC MEDICAID; DC OFFICE OF CONTRACTING AND PROCUREMENT; REHABILITATION SERVICES; HEALTH REGULATION; MENTAL HEALTH AND OTHERS. THE COORDINATION AND RESPONSIVENESS OF THESE AGENCIES IN SUPPORT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES HAS ALWAYS BEEN

RECOGNIZED AS CRITICAL TO MEETING THE COMPLIANCE MEASURES IN *EVANS*. THE MAYOR HAS DELEGATED RESPONSIBILITY FOR COORDINATION TO THE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR CHILDREN YOUTH FAMILIES AND ELDERS. FINALLY, AS PERFORMANCE PRESSURE MOUNTED FROM THE COMMUNITY OF FAMILIES, CLIENTS, AND ADVOCATES, THESE ISSUES WERE CHARACTERIZED AS MY FAILINGS. I WISH TO MAKE VERY CLEAR TO YOU THAT MRDDA DOES NOT HAVE THE SKILLED EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP OR KNOWLEDGEABLE LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT THAT UNDERSTANDS THE NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE SERVED.

CONCLUSION

THE DISTRICT MRDDA IS IN NEED OF RADICAL REALIGNMENT. THE REPLACEMENT OF THE ADMINISTRATOR IS, QUITE FRANKLY, A WOEFULLY INADEQUATE STEP IN ALLEVIATING THE SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS OF THIS ADMINISTRATION. I SUBMIT A FEW ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED AND GIVEN SUPPORT TO BE IMPLEMENTED:

- MRDDA NEEDS THE UNDIVIDED ATTENTION OF THE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP, AND SHOULD THEREFORE REPORT DIRECTLY TO THE CITY ADMINISTRATOR;
- CONSISTENT BUDGET OVERRUNS FROM A SOCIAL SERVICES PROGRAM OF THIS MAGNITUDE AND WITH THESE PERSISTENT ISSUES CRIES OUT FOR ADEQUATE FUNDING WITH APPROPRIATE PERFORMANCE MEASURES;
- A NEW MEDICAID WAIVER AND THE RESOURCES TO CARRY OUT THE PROGRAM'S MANDATE MUST BE IMPLEMENTED NOW;

- EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP COUPLED WITH A LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE CHAIR WHO WILL COMMIT THE TIME TO UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY, AND
- WITHOUT THE ABOVE MINIMAL COMMITMENTS, THE AGENCY SHOULD BE IMMEDIATELY PLACED INTO RECEIVERSHIP.

WHILE THE DISTRICT IS MOVING IN A POSITIVE DIRECTION, AND I AM SURE WILL CONTINUE TO BUILD UPON ITS ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE, MUCH IS LEFT TO BE DONE AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT. MY PRIMARY REGRET IS THAT I WAS UNABLE TO GARNER THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF SUPPORT TO BRING SYSTEM CHANGE TO THE MRDDA.

THANK YOU CHAIRMAN DAVIS AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS. I AM PLEASED TO ANSWER QUESTIONS TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY AND KNOWLEDGE AT THIS TIME.